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THE LITTLE KING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

AN ODE TO HARVARD

TIGER

THE LITTLE KING

The Little King

by WITTER BYNNER

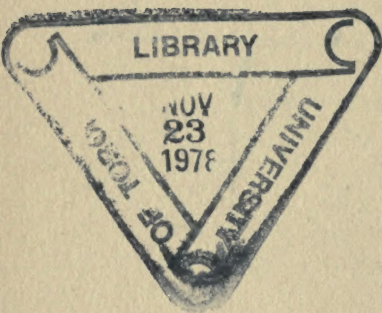
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1914


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To
*Homer and Carlota Saint-Gaudens
And Their Little Boy*



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The Little King

Time: The morning of October 16, 1793.

Scene: In the Temple at Paris: a room in which is imprisoned Louis XVII, the Boy-King of France, under the tutelage of Antoine Simon and his wife, Jeanne Marie.

Behind a large iron-barred door at the back is an anteroom from which one staircase descends to the courtyard and another ascends to a platform on the roof of the Temple. A closed door leads at the left into a bedroom. Near it stands an elaborate bird-cage in which a wooden canary moves when wound up and whistles "The March of the King." In the cage are also some live canaries, one of which has a red ribbon round its neck. A small barred window at the right overlooks the courtyard. Under it are a box of mortar and some squared stones, one or two of which have al-

ready been set into the window. Nearby is a table, a cupboard of dishes and on the floor a basket of soiled linen.

At rise of the curtain, Jeanne Marie, with a dish in her hand, stands by a larger table where three people have just finished a light meal. She is a squat woman of fifty with thick features and a blotched face. While she clears the table, she talks with Barelle, apparently a middle-aged stonemason, who is mixing mortar with his trowel near the window.

JEANNE

[As she carries soiled dishes into the ante-room]

What?—Block the door and shut out all the light?

BARELLE

The window first and afterward both doors. A grating left there for his meals, but not An aperture for light or hope or mercy.

JEANNE

Ah, but the chumps have chosen you to do The job! Luck's with us, Citizen Barelle.

BARELLE

You mean God's with us. God himself,
not they,
Selected me,—to be His instrument.

JEANNE

There's damnable divinity in gold.
You be the God. I'll be the instrument.

BARELLE

*[Removing from the window a cross-shaped
iron bar]*

O Father, prove Thy greatness to these
people

That have turned coward toward a little
boy,

Son of the King they killed! O Lord, reach
down

Thy hand to us! For Jesus' sake, Thy Son,
Give me Thy strength to save the Son of
France!

JEANNE

[Seizing the iron bar]

Here's holy water for your crucifix.

[She spits on it and throws it on the floor]

BARELLE

God pity you.—By noon I shall be back
And I shall bring the boy. Does the King
know?

JEANNE

Leave that to me. You fetch the other King.
And, please, the puppy-dog has learned his
change
Of name. Not King, not Louis any more!
Just call him Capet and he'll wag his tail
With quite remarkable intelligence.

BARELLE

How are you going to manage with Michel?

JEANNE

Michel relieves the other guard at noon.
As soon as he's alone he'll signal us.

BARELLE

Your husband——

JEANNE

Leave my husband to your God!
Leave everything to God—except His Im-
age;

Soon as the coin comes round—leave that
to me;
And while we're talking—what about the
coin?

BARELLE

One payment now. The rest as we agreed.

JEANNE

God in three parts! And one part now!
Come pay it!

BARELLE

*[Taking from inside his blouse a bag of
gold, which he hands to her]*
And you at noon pay me my King!
[Exit Barelle]

JEANNE

[To the bag of gold]
Sweet God!
*[She kisses it, then hides it in her sewing-
basket on the small table. Humming a snatch
of the Marseillaise, she throws open the bed-
room door and calls through it with her
arms akimbo]*

Capet, your eyes are red. Go scrub your face.

Make it all red like a washerlady's son.

THE KING

[*A boy of nine, his voice heard outside*]

I am a Queen's son!

JEANNE

Times have changed, my dear,
And Marie Antoinette has handkerchiefs
To wash, she cries so much. Her nose now
looks

Like anyone's and gets as red as mine.

THE KING

It is not red.

JEANNE

Go make yours red, Capet!
For you're to be a washerlady's son
This very day.—Sh-h! Don't you tell An-
toine!

[*She hears him on his way upstairs singing
a revolutionary chant. She quickly closes the*

bedroom door and turns toward the ante-room where Antoine Simon enters. He is a big shoemaker of fifty-five, with straight black hair hanging long and a swarthy brutish face. He carries aloft two bottles of brandy]

ANTOINE

I've brought two friends with me.

JEANNE

[Seizing a corkscrew]

Off with their heads!

ANTOINE

Let go my friends! I bring 'em here like this

And you—you murder 'em! You used to be A stylish drinker, Jeanne Marie. But now You're an old soak.

JEANNE

Only a soak would talk

Like that. I taste my glass the same as ever. It's you who booze like a lout and waste a lot

On Capet, just to make the poor brat drunk.

ANTOINE

You're keen to see him caper round, yourself.
But you don't pay your share. You get two-
thirds

As much as me for staying in this hole
And you never spend a sou.

[He sits and changes his boots for slippers]

JEANNE

[Carrying dishes from table to cupboard]

The nation takes
Good care of you, husband,—also of me:
Six thousand livres your share, four thou-
sand mine.

ANTOINE

A patriotic cobbler and his wife
Cooped up like marquises!

JEANNE

You make me sick,
Talking like that about ten thousand livres.
You don't know what you want, you lucky
fool.

ANTOINE

Know what I want? I want to be let off
From tutoring Capet. But let me off
They won't. They've got me here. And
here I stick

And rot. It's bad for the brain, that's
what it is.

Capet's much luckier than we are, Jeanne,
For he has us, he has, for company,
But we have only him.

*[The King, a handsome, gentle boy, appears
at the bedroom door. Antoine hurls his boot
at the King]*

Get out of here!

*[The King looks calmly at them both, then
returns into the bedroom. Jeanne Marie
closes the door after him]*

JEANNE

[In a superstitious whisper]

He looked at me as my boy Raymond did.
He looked at me as my dead Raymond
did.

ANTOINE

Forget your Raymond! Capet isn't Raymond.

JEANNE

You're sore because he waked you up last night.

ANTOINE

With his damn prayers! I fixed him good.
He'll not
Be trying Trappist tricks on me again.

JEANNE

[*Angrily*]

Yes, fixed him good and maybe fixed yourself.

Doused him with water, let him lie between
The icy sheets and shiver all night long!
What if he's caught his death?

ANTOINE

What did they say
When I asked 'em, the Committee, about
Capet,

Whether they wanted me to poison him?
They said, ' Well, don't you let him grow too
much! '

Wife dear, what did they mean?

JEANNE

They meant, ' Don't add
A cubit to his stature,—cut him short,
But not too short! ' They know their busi-
ness best.

Why do you suppose they send a mason
here?

ANTOINE

Barelle, you mean?

JEANNE

To seal that window up.

ANTOINE

Make bats of us?

JEANNE

No, not of us. Of him!
They're going to block the door and lock
him in.

ANTOINE

And lock us out?

JEANNE

We'll feed him through a hole
Cut here and talk to him an hour a day.

ANTOINE

On what?

JEANNE

On Liberty.

ANTOINE

Woman, he'll live
For years.

JEANNE

O no, my dove, he's delicate.

ANTOINE

But I've a mind to do for him today
And end this job.

JEANNE

You're good at jokes about

Our Lady Guillotine. She might arrange
A joke on you. And, citizen, I fear
You wouldn't laugh so well without your
mouth.

ANTOINE

Well, I don't see who'd care about a Capet.

JEANNE

Because they had no use for Louis Capet?
Because they say about the Austrian,
"Why does she ask for cake, when there is
dust

To eat"? But people have soft hearts.
They might

Forgive the boy his dirty breed, Antoine.
A child's a child, no matter from what stock.
Besides France has her enemies abroad
Who call the whelp a king. France has her
game

To play. And this one Louis—see?—this
poor

Thin undecipherable piece may be
A lucky coin. I grasp it all so clearly.
And I tell you, Antoine, clever as you are,

When the Council General sent the Simons
here,
They put their trust as a matter of fact—
in me.

ANTOINE

You put your trust in your four thousand
livres
All right, but drink your brandy on my pay,
On the six thousand which they give to me
For being less important than my wife.

JEANNE

A child's head looks ridiculous on a pike.

ANTOINE

No, it looks cute.

JEANNE

Hey, Antoine, listen! Drums.

ANTOINE

Some one they've got to guillotine, I guess.

JEANNE

The roof, the platform! Call if you can see!

ANTOINE

I'll bet you first it's Marie Antoinette.

JEANNE

An end of her? Not on your life, my dear!

If it were women trying her, then yes.

But this Tribunal? Men, Antoine? Not much!

ANTOINE

Justice decides and Justice is a female!

JEANNE

They'll feast for days upon those dainty eyes

Before the garbage goes. If she's a beauty—

I hope I'm not.

ANTOINE

You're not.

JEANNE

Trust her with men?

She's got you, all of you, just where you're weak—

She'd charm the hind leg off the Lamb o' God!

ANTOINE

Bet me the brandy on it?—the cost of the brandy?

JEANNE

Double the cost! It's not the Widow Capet.

ANTOINE

[At the window]

I'll ask Michel. He'll know. He's just come on.

JEANNE

O husband, how I wish the Guillotine
Was near, where we could watch, to cheer
us up!

In seven weeks I haven't seen one head.

[Antoine goes upstairs through the ante-room. Jeanne Marie rapidly takes a piece of soiled linen and wrapping her bag of money tightly so that it shall not jingle, lays the bundle aside on the little table. Then she enters the anteroom and calls to her husband]

Who wins, Antoine?

ANTOINE

[*Outside*]

I do! I win!

JEANNE

The Queen?

ANTOINE

[*Entering*]

I heard 'em shouting, "Death to Madam
Veto!"

At noon they'll split her like an angle worm!
Hustle him out. I've news for him.

JEANNE

No, no,

Not yet—he's sick! And when his father
croaked

He wouldn't eat, was like to die himself.

Go easy, Antoine, for he's off his feed.

You don't know what might happen. This'll
keep.

You'll have the fun. I'll not sneak in ahead.

ANTOINE

The brandy, open it. No, pay me first!

[He opens a bottle. She reluctantly pays him, taking the money from her stocking]

I tell you what we'll do. We'll make him drink.

And then we'll make him dance, dance to the bells,

The bells that ring when they lift up her head!

That's one on you, old girl! Now fetch the brat,

We'll celebrate.

JEANNE

[Opening the door]

Capet! Aristocrat!

ANTOINE

What are you doing? Eating up those pears
You took from lunch so's not to eat with us?
Come out here! Join your betters!

JEANNE

Careful now!

[The King enters from the bedroom. He has in his hands two pears, which he lays on a chair. Jeanne Marie intercepts Antoine]

Come here, Capet, I want to tell you something:

A caller's coming—Citizen Barelle.

THE KING

You told me that.

ANTOINE

You like him, don't you?

THE KING

No.

ANTOINE

You do, you little liar.

THE KING

No, I don't.

ANTOINE

Why do you lie to me?

THE KING

I do not like him.

JEANNE

Have you forgotten that he brought you these?

You like your birds, you ought to like him too.

THE KING

[*After a pause*]

But if I did, they would not let him come.

ANTOINE

Your tutor, Simon, never goes away.

They let him come.

JEANNE

You're fond of him, ain't you?

ANTOINE

Come, answer us! You love me, don't you?

THE KING

Yes.

ANTOINE

You little liar!

THE KING

Why do you ask me then?

JEANNE

D'you like me, Capet?

THE KING

Where's my Mama-Queen?

She isn't walking up there any more.

I listen and I listen. Is she sick?

Where have they taken her?

ANTOINE

Don't use that word!

JEANNE

Don't you say Queen! Your tutor doesn't
like it.

THE KING

Where is she gone?

JEANNE

She's sick.

THE KING

I thought she was.

O can't I go to her? Please can't I go
To her?

JEANNE

Not much!

THE KING

Then can't I send her these?

O can't I? Can't I send her my canaries?

JEANNE

You haven't heard that Citizen Barelle
Will bring Robert, the washerwoman's boy,
To stay a little while and play with you?

THE KING

O Master, let me send her my canaries?

ANTOINE

Sit down. We're going to celebrate. Three
glasses!

[Jeanne Marie brings the glasses]

THE KING

I do not care for one.

ANTOINE

Sit down, I say!

Here's to the Guillotine! Pick up your
glass.

[*The King draws back*]

Do you want it down your neck? The Guillotine!

And my good-luck! Come on now.

[*Antoine and Jeanne Marie drink, then he makes the King drink*]

THE KING

What good-luck?

JEANNE

[*With a moment of pity*]

It's better luck than you would understand.

ANTOINE

I won a bet, young man. I won that wine.

JEANNE

And it's a happy day in the Republic!

THE KING

If it's a really happy day, I'm glad.

ANTOINE

Then drink to France!—Our Lady Guillotine

Drinks blood today to France!

THE KING

Who is it now?

JEANNE

[*Preventing Antoine from telling*]

People you know who used to be at Court.

ANTOINE

There's no more Court.

THE KING

O dear, why do they kill

Good people,—only good, kind people?

Why?

ANTOINE

Dunno. They have a funny way with them.

They'll take me next.

THE KING

They'll never take you, Master.

ANTOINE

Ain't you the little joker! Catch your ball!

Why don't you hold your hands out, blunderhead?

Can't even learn to catch a ball! We'll see

If you can sing. You know! Your favorite!

[*He sings, Jeanne Marie joining him*]

Madam Veto thought she could

Make all Paris run with blood;

But it didn't come off,

Thanks to a cough—

(Dance, dance the Carmagnole!)

Thanks to a cough—

Of the cannon!

Put spirit in it, Capet. Now! Pipe up!

THE KING

“Madam Veto thought she——” O no, no!

I cannot sing that song.

ANTOINE

Why not?

THE KING

Because

You mean my Mother. And it isn't true.

She hasn't done them any harm. She loves

Her people, Mother does.

ANTOINE

She loves her wolves,

Her Austrians! Her people aren't the French.

THE KING

Her people are the French. She told me so.

ANTOINE

You going to sing?

THE KING

How can I sing it, Master?

I cannot sing bad songs about my Mother.

ANTOINE

You sang it yesterday.

THE KING

Master, I didn't.

ANTOINE

Didn't he, Jeanne Marie?

JEANNE

Of course he did.

THE KING

I didn't.

ANTOINE

Little fool, you don't know what
You do. Get drunk. Here, get a jag and
sing
Again. You're jolly when you're drunk. To
France!

THE KING

O no, no, no!—not if I sang that song!
What if my Mother heard me sing that
song?

ANTOINE

She's heard you sing it! Sure she has! It's
done

Her good, shown her how well I keep my
word:

'He shall receive a royal education;
We shall instruct him to forget the past
And only to remember he's a child
Of the one and indivisible Republic.'

You sing your song. You won't? Then
take this drink.

The young wolf shuts his teeth. See, Jeanne
Marie,

What savage little teeth! He must be tamed.

Where's there a knife to pry them open with?

We'll cure his pride. Now will you sing that song?

Down on your knees! Learn this——

JEANNE

Let him alone.

ANTOINE

Obedience comes first in Simon's course.

[He forces the King to the floor]

Open your mouth. Drink this. Well then, try this,

Try this!

JEANNE

Antoine! Give me that knife!

[She takes it from him]

ANTOINE

Get up.

[He roughly lifts the motionless King]

Open your mouth and say you ask my pardon

And we'll postpone the music-lesson. What?
Won't talk?

[Jeanne Marie turns toward the anteroom, where Barelle enters, followed by Robert, who, looking like the King in height, color and feature, brings a basket of clean clothes and a bouquet of roses tied with the tricolor. They see Antoine about to strike the King with the cross-shaped iron bar]

BARELLE

You dog! Is that good tutelage?

JEANNE

For insolence it is!

ANTOINE

The little snob,
I couldn't make him drink the health of
France!

THE KING

(Grasping the glass)

You lie!—To France!

[As he holds the brandy high and then drinks, the bells ring out]

JEANNE

The bells!

ANTOINE

She's dead! She's dead!
The holiday! The Carmagnole! She's
dead!

THE KING

What do you say? I'm dizzy. France is
dead?

JEANNE

France that was crucified—has come to life!

ANTOINE

The resurrection! Dance, my darling,
dance!

*[They start singing the Marseillaise and
take his hands]*

THE KING

No!—not to that tune! Wait and I will
dance.

*[He breaks away and turns on the catch
which sets the toy canary whistling]*

I'll dance to my tune, mine!—The March
of the King!

[*Jeanne Marie turns off the catch*]

BARELLE

[*Interposing between Antoine's anger and
the King*]

Go slowly, Citizen, to cure a King.

The lilies flourished for a thousand years.

Uprooting them takes time.

JEANNE

Well,—time takes root.

BARELLE

How are your birds, Capet?

ANTOINE

They sing, but he?—

He has the pip!

BARELLE

[*Crossing to work at the window*]

I left an officer

Behind me on the stairs whose legs were
weak

With too much holiday. He's bound, he says,

'To mourn the dead with Citizen Simon.'

JEANNE

[Handing Antoine the bottle and glasses]

Here! Comfort him! The platform's pleasanter.

[While Barelle fits a stone into the window, Jeanne Marie sees Antoine out and closes the heavy door after him]

THE KING

[Politely to Jeanne Marie]

He doesn't understand about the window.

You said that he was going to mend the window.

JEANNE

That's what he's doing. There were holes in it.

BARELLE

Let's see which one is taller of you boys.

[They measure back to back]

ROBERT

We're just the same.

THE KING

Why, yes, we're just the same.

[*Receiving from Robert the bunch of roses*]

Thank you, Robert.

ROBERT

I thought you'd like them. Look!

Look underneath the roses,—look at this!

THE KING

My flower, my flower!

BARELLE

A lily for the King.

[*The King kisses the lily and hides it again under the roses*]

THE KING

Sir, you've been kind to me both times you've come.

Last time you brought me my canary-birds.

I have not anything to give to you

But these two pears which I have saved from lunch.

And, just because I am so poor, I beg
That you will please me, sir, by taking one.
And will you take the other one, Robert!

BARELLE

I thank your Majesty.

JEANNE

Get up! Don't call
Him that. It isn't done. You're right,
they are
As like as peas. Listen to me, Capet.
Take off your things. Put on Robert's.

THE KING

What for?

JEANNE

[*On guard near the big door*]
You're going to be Robert. Obey Barelle,
Do everything he says. For, if you don't,
They'll kick you, whip you and cut off your
head.

BARELLE

You'll come with me?

THE KING

I'll go with you and do
Just what you tell me to. But afterwards
They'll punish me.

BARELLE

You do not understand.
We are your friends. We come to free you,
Sire.

THE KING

My Mother too?—my Mother?

BARELLE

Where you go,
The Queen shall follow you. Be sure of
that.

THE KING

Then take me to her! That will make me
sure.

BARELLE

Robert, your coat!

[*Robert takes off his coat and waits by the
bedroom door*]

THE KING

I think you are my friend.

JEANNE

[Showing and patting her bundle]

He's counted out the proof of it in cash.

He's paid me money. Think of it, for you!—

A little piece of rotten meat like you!

BARELLE

[To Jeanne Marie]

You are the rotten meat I purchased!

JEANNE

Pooh!

Don't wave your crest at me, old cockatoo!

THE KING

You mean that you have had to pay for me?

ROBERT

Come quick, for we must change our clothes,
you know.

THE KING

[To Robert, in the doorway]

Mother will look at me that funny way

And not know which to do, to laugh or cry,
And not do either—but just look at me.
Doesn't your mother look at you like that?

ROBERT

Come, little King, and change our clothes.

THE KING

Mine does.

[He follows Robert into the bedroom]

BARELLE

You'll watch the door?

JEANNE

[Opening the big door a crack]

The platform-stairway creaks.

I always hear him coming.

BARELLE

[Looking through the window]

What?—Two guards?

JEANNE

We'll have to wait till Michel's there alone,
Before you start.

[She sits and sews listening by the big door]

BARELLE

[Setting another stone in place, watching]

I wish that you had told Antoine.

JEANNE

I'm no such fool. I know Antoine.
He would have shilly-shallied half-a-year.
Antoine's a coward. If I do the thing,
Saving him all the pains and half the cash,
He'll thank me when it's done. I know
Antoine.

BARELLE

He may come down.

JEANNE

Then let me manage him,
Bottle him up again and think for him
And act for him,—and put a sum away
With which to make him love me by-and-by.

BARELLE

How little you have learned from our mis-
take!
You care for him by caring for his money

As we took care of you by keeping yours.—
There would have been no need of blood
and tears,
If only my poor friends had counted well
And learned the deadly peril of too much
And dared to be contented with enough.

JEANNE

Enough is not enough and never will be.
I tell you, Citizen, there's no such thing
As coin enough. Look at the two of us!—
You've had too much and you philosophize.
I've had too little and I kick up hell.
But those who have enough—lie in their
graves.

Too much, too little—life! Enough—the
end.

[*The boys enter, each in the other's clothes.
The King has Robert's liberty cap in his
hand*]

THE KING

I have on everything. But not the cap!

JEANNE

Put that on too. No matter where you go,

You'll never wear a crown in France again.
Put that on too, my darling Citizen.

[The King still holds it in his hand]

BARELLE

Run back again, if anyone should come,
And change the jackets—that would do.

JEANNE

And then

Come out again like you'd been playing ball.
Here, Capet, take it, have it in your pocket.
When Michel's by himself, Barelle, don't
wait

To talk. Just go. See, Capet, there's your
load.

I've lightened it,—so's not to strain your
wings.

*[She sits and sews again by the big door.
The King tries the weight of the basket,
then lays it down and stands watching Rob-
ert. Presently he takes Robert by the hand
and leads him to the cage of canaries]*

THE KING

[Softly]

I like the one you gave me best of all.

My toy canary sings 'The March of the King'

And the one you gave me tries to copy him.

[They sit on the floor by the cage]

I've tied a little ribbon on his neck
To tell him by.—I think he knows me,
Robert.

He lets me take him out of the cage and
talk

To him. And he turns his head and looks.
And once

He sang to me sitting right on my finger.
O how I wish my Mama-Queen could see
him!

They wouldn't let me send him up to her.
She's sick and ought to have all sorts of
things

To comfort her.—Perhaps they'll let me
send

My flowers to her. Wouldn't you like to
have

Them comfort her, Robert, instead of me,
Because she's sick, you know?

ROBERT

Yes, little King.

THE KING

I do not like to have you call me King.

They might not let you play with me
again. . . .

And then besides it means my Father's dead.

ROBERT

The King is dead,—long live the Little
King!

THE KING

The night he left he took me on his knee
And held my hand and made me swear,
Robert,

That I'd forgive his people everything
And not be harsh with them when I grow up.
And don't you think that that was like Our
Savior?

Next day my Mother helped me pray for
him;

But when I tried to think of the good God,
I couldn't think of anyone but Papa.

Why did they kill him, Robert?

ROBERT

Mother says
Because their hearts are bronze.

THE KING

I told my Father,
The day I lost Moufflet, my dog, the day
We came to the Temple and the men stuck
out
Their tongues and knocked the statue down
and called
My Mother names, I told my Father then
How bad they were. But he said, 'No, they
weren't.'
He said that they would understand him
some day
And find that we were just like them and ask
Our pardon for the way they treated us.
You ought to have seen how Mama looked
at him!
And then she kissed him. Kissed me, too.
And she
Was crying, Robert, for I think she knew
Better than Papa what was happening.
There's nobody so wonderful as Mama.

Why do they call her names and sing bad
songs

About her, when she's good? My Mother's
good.

She doesn't hate the people.

JEANNE

Shut your mouth,
Capet, and pay attention! Watch Barelle!

BARELLE

He will not go, the man will never go!—
Hast Thou forgotten us?

JEANNE

Don't drag in God.
Just wait and watch and, when the time
comes, act.
You'll learn some day there isn't any God.
[*They all wait a moment or two, silent*]

THE KING

[*Whispering, close to Robert*]

When I was little, Mama had her hair
Away up high with a hundred waves in it.
And on the waves were tiny ships, Robert!

O it was wonderful! She waked me up
To let me see it.—And I had a sword.

JEANNE

[Jumping to her feet]

He's coming! Quick, the both of you, get in
there!

[The boys run into the bedroom. Jeanne Marie shuts them in, then sits again and sews. Barelle works at the window]

ANTOINE

[Entering]

We want another bottle of that brandy.

JEANNE

Here, take it. Drink it up. To hell with
Queens!

ANTOINE

What's the son of the she-wolf doing, hey?

[To Barelle]

I'm not supposed to take my eye off him,
You know. Even asleep, one eye must be
Propped up and watching him. A pretty job!
Where is he?

JEANNE

Here's your bottle.

ANTOINE

*[Brushing her aside and opening the door
of the bedroom]*

Come on out

Of there!

[Stopping short, then turning savagely]

What's this, Barelle?

BARELLE

What, Citizen?

ANTOINE

They're changing coats!—Barelle, what
game is this?

JEANNE

If brandy makes a muddle in your brain——

ANTOINE

Come out here, you two!

[The King enters, his coat in his hand]

Both of you!

*[Robert follows, cap on but carrying his
coat]*

By God!——

What is this game you're playing?

ROBERT

Citizen——

THE KING

We're playing ball.

ANTOINE

Show me the ball.

THE KING

[Finding it in the pocket of his coat]

It's here.

ANTOINE

[Knocking it out of the King's hand]

Ball in a room that hasn't any light!

What were you changing clothes for?—tell me that!

THE KING

We changed our jackets. He didn't want to, Master.

I made him play a game of masquerade.

ANTOINE

The hell you did!

[He seizes the King by the throat]

BARELLE

Let him alone! Hands off!

ANTOINE

Not hands off! Heads off! And yours first,
Barelle!

JEANNE

Yours second, Antoine!

ANTOINE

Hold your dirty lip!
You're in on it!

JEANNE

You lose your head like this
To-day, you'll lose it good to-morrow. Fool!
What do you mean to do?

ANTOINE

Accuse Barelle.

JEANNE

And me?

ANTOINE

And you—and get ten thousand
livres
For taking care of Capet by myself!

JEANNE

Try it and see! You send me to the scaffold,
I'll just turn round and take you with me,
dear.
You broke the rules, left Capet with Ba-
relle
And kept the officer outside. Why that?—
The reason was a hundred thousand livres!

ANTOINE

What's this? What hundred thousand?

JEANNE

*[Lifting her bundle from the table and
letting it drop back clinking]*
Use your ears.

BARELLE

I've sixty thousand here in Paris,—yours!
This ring! The Prince of Condé's. Take
him this,

He'll pay the rest. Now, sir! your life is
more

To you than mine to me. I've got you there.
But you can save yours, mine,—and earn,
besides,

Another hundred thousand livres.

JEANNE

That is—

Besides my hundred thousand?

BARELLE

Yes.

JEANNE

Good God!

BARELLE

Nobody ever comes who knows the King.

JEANNE

And I'll fall sick and we can get away.

BARELLE

With all the cash you need for all your lives.

JEANNE

Antoine, that means as much as ten whole
years

Of prison and the brat. Go on upstairs!

ANTOINE

You should have let me in on this before.

JEANNE

Shut up with your 'before'! It's 'now.'
Go on!

That's all you've got to do. Go on up-
stairs!

ANTOINE

Well, I don't know. I guess I'd better do it.

JEANNE

Here! You're forgetting what you came to
fetch.

[She hands him the second bottle of brandy]

ANTOINE

[Brandishing it at Barelle]

I'd like to smash your head, you Royalist!

BARELLE

God knows, my hand would like——

JEANNE

Quit quarrelling.

I'll see if Michel's there alone.—He is!

Go! Go!

BARELLE

Give me your jacket! Quick, Robert!

Come! and be careful, O be careful, Sire!

THE KING

[*As they put him into Robert's coat*]

My little birds, good-bye. Good-bye, Robert.

My Mother-Queen will bless you when I tell
her.—

O shall I see green trees again and sky
Spread out?—O think of it—the sky spread
out!

ROBERT

And lots of birds!

BARELLE

Good-bye, Robert.

ROBERT

Good-bye.

BARELLE

You are a brave and darling boy, Robert.

ROBERT

Good-bye, good-bye.

[Barelle kisses him, then turns to the King]

BARELLE

Be quiet now and follow.

Be careful.

THE KING

I'll be careful. I know how.

ROBERT

Good-bye.

ANTOINE

O shut your mouth!

[With a sudden blow he knocks Robert to the floor]

THE KING

[Standing stock still]

I cannot go.

I had not thought of that.—I cannot go.
You are too little.

JEANNE

I'll be here. I'll take
His part.

THE KING

You can't, you can't, when Master—
No!

ANTOINE

Go while the going's good. You're wasting
time.

[Antoine lurches out and is heard calling]

I've found the brandy, Friend. She tried
to hide it.

THE KING

O no, Robert! the people over there,
If they should find me gone, would punish
you
And maybe kill you.

ROBERT

[Rising]

But they won't find out.

I'll turn my head away and I won't talk
To them.

THE KING

He'll make you talk. He'll make
you sing.

And when he has you here alone, Robert——!

I had not thought of that. I cannot go.

BARELLE

They'll soon find out who Robert is——

JEANNE

What's this?

BARELLE

They'll think that he was used against his
will,

Without his knowing,—and they'll let
him go.

THE KING

Once you are here, they never let you go.

O no, Robert, give me my coat, take yours!

[*He slips off Robert's coat*]

JEANNE

You little chump, keep on that coat! Behave
Yourself! You're stubborn as your mother.

THE KING

Am I?

ROBERT

Please, little King, please, please!

BARELLE

Your Majesty!

THE KING

*[Resisting Barelle's attempts to put the coat
back on him]*

I will not go. You cannot make me go.

Robert could never stand it as I can.

A King can stand—O more than anyone!

JEANNE

Here, hold him, Citizen. Bring him your
cap,

Robert. Come now, Capet, behave your-
self!

THE KING

[*Still resisting the coat, and throwing the cap down*]

And then, besides, I've thought of something else.

You might save me and not my Mother-Queen.

She might be left here all alone upstairs.

JEANNE

She's not upstairs, you little whining fool.
They should have killed you too and saved us trouble,

You with your mother, the whelp with the she-wolf!

BARELLE

O shame!

THE KING

My Mother-Queen?

JEANNE

To-day at noon.

You heard the bells, Capet, and drank her health!

BARELLE

Great God!

ROBERT

[*Taking the other boy's hand*]

Poor little King!

THE KING

It is not true.

You wish to make me go. It is not true.

If it were true, you would have told me then.

I will not go and leave my Mother-Queen.

I will not go.

JEANNE

Tell him it's true and get

Him out of here. We haven't time to fool

Away like this.

BARELLE

[*Tenderly, gravely*]

Your Majesty, it's true.

THE KING

My Mama-Queen?

BARELLE

Is with your father, Sire.

She died to-day, as brave as she had lived.

They would not let her say good-bye to you.

ROBERT

Poor little King!

THE KING

[*With a sob*]

She isn't dead! no, no,

She isn't dead. My Mama isn't dead.

BARELLE

Be brave, your Majesty, as she was brave.

A man on horseback told me what she said.

She said: 'I was a Queen and you de-throned me.

I was a wife and you have killed my husband.

I was a mother and you tear my children

Away from me. Only my blood is left.

Make haste to shed it. And be satisfied.'

THE KING

O she was brave, my Mother, wasn't she!

I'm going to be like Mother.

ROBERT

Little King!

BARELLE

Then, -don't you see, you owe it to your
kingdom

And to her memory to come with me?

That will be brave, your Majesty.

JEANNE

Go on,

Flatter him up! Perhaps he'll take to that.

I never saw such people as these Capets.

BARELLE

And you shall have your sword again and
come

Some day to punish murderers.

THE KING

O sir,

I promised both my Father and my Mother
Never to hurt the people. But I'm not
Afraid of them. My Father said to me
He could not run away from them and be
A coward. That was why we all came back.

And I should be ashamed to run away
And not be like my Father and my Mother.

JEANNE

Shut up his talk! Get busy while there's
time!

Take him!

*[Barelle and Jeanne Marie try again to
force Robert's jacket on the King, who strug-
gles against them]*

THE KING

No, you shall not.

BARELLE

[Passionately]

Your Majesty!

*[They lead him into the anteroom, the King
contesting every inch of the way]*

BARELLE

For God's sake!

JEANNE

Little fool!

THE KING

I will not go.

BARELLE

If you betray us, it will be the end.

THE KING

O won't you please obey me? Won't you please?—

[He breaks away. Barelle follows and lays hold of him again. But, with a sudden royal gesture, he checks Barelle in the centre of the room]

I am the King of France. Obey me, sir,
And take your hands away.

BARELLE

God's will be done.

JEANNE

[Trying to pass Barelle]

God's nothing! It's the antic of a child!

[Barelle holds Jeanne Marie back while the King helps Robert into the washerboy's coat]

THE KING

But O be sure, be sure you come again!
The Simons will not dare to tell on you,

• For I should tell on them. Take all the clothes!

[Picking up Jeanne Marie's bundle from the table]

Take these as well, Robert. And look inside

And you will find a keepsake there from me.

JEANNE

Not on your life!

THE KING

You wish me then to tell?

[Jeanne Marie stands back glowering while he gives Robert the bundle. Then he takes the lily from his bouquet and hands it to Barelle]

This lily is much better than the pear.

BARELLE

I ask you, Sire, to let her keep the money.
She would be kinder.

THE KING

Take them all, Robert.

[Barelle bows and hides the lily in his breast]

JEANNE

You little cur—you devil out of hell!

[Hearing the stairs creak]

The officer!

[Barelle crosses to the window and seals the next to the last opening]

ANTOINE

[Entering, at the big door, heavy with brandy, his finger on his lips]

He's on his way downstairs.

BARELLE

It does not matter now. My work is done.

ANTOINE

[Looking closely at Robert]

Your work is done, you say? What do you mean?

BARELLE

All but one stone.

ANTOINE

One stone?

THE KING

Good-bye, my friends.

[Barelle kneels and kisses the King's hand. The King will not let Robert kneel, but puts an arm about him and kisses him on the lips. Robert goes out with the basket at the big door]

BARELLE

Surely you cannot punish him for this!
What has he done but shown that tyranny
May go by any name and wear red caps,—
While loving comradeship may dwell in
kings!—

Father, forget not he's a little boy!

[Jeanne Marie hurries Barelle out and closes the door after him]

JEANNE

He wouldn't go.

ANTOINE

You rotten little snake!

JEANNE

He gave the money back. He said he'd tell.

THE KING

You cannot buy and sell the King of France.

ANTOINE

But we can make him pay!

[He goes to the cage of canaries and starts to bring a chair down over it]

THE KING

[In the way]

What are you doing?

ANTOINE

I'm smashing up your royal bird that pipes
'The March of the King.'

THE KING

But not the other birds!

O not the one——!

ANTOINE

Which one?

THE KING

—that sings to us!

The little one! The ribbon's on his neck!

ANTOINE

So that's your toy!—your kingdom in a cage!

And orders, marks! We'll see!

THE KING

The ribbon's red!—

He's my republican canary, Master!

ANTOINE

Favorite of the King, come out here, you!

[He thrusts his hand into the cage and takes out the bird]

THE KING

O give him, give him to me!

ANTOINE

There he is.

[He wrings the bird's neck and throws its dead body on the floor]

THE KING

[Kneeling and taking the bird up tenderly]

O listen to me, please, dear Heavenly Father!

JEANNE

Don't mention God again!—There is no God.

THE KING

—Help me to be as brave as Mother was.

ANTOINE

Get up. Give that to me. Here, Jeanne Marie,

[Taking the bird from the King, he tosses it to her]

Cook it for supper.

[He jerks the King to his feet and points to the red cap on the floor]

Now pick up that cap!

JEANNE

And put it on again!

[The King faces them, not moving]

ANTOINE

You dirty pup!

JEANNE

You put that on!—or else we'll punish you

Worse than you've ever dreamed. The
window's sealed,

Capet. And now we'll seal this door, and
this,

And cut a little hole here in the middle,
And then hand in your food to you and leave
You in the dark, all day, all night, forever.
You've heard the rats here in the walls?

They'll all

Come out, when you can't see them, and
they'll eat

Your food. And then they'll eat your fin-
gers, Capet.

And bugs and worms and snakes will come
and wait

For you to go to sleep.—Pick up that cap.

ANTOINE

Pick up that cap.

*[The King moves toward it and quietly
stands on it, facing them. Antoine crosses
and sets the last stone in the window, darken-
ing the stage so that only shadows are seen]*

JEANNE

[Pointing, trying to laugh]

Behold the little King!

*[Then they open the big door and close it
behind them, and leave him standing in the
darkness]*

CURTAIN



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The little king

